

Francis Connor House  
Shelton Avenue  
Alexandria  
Huntingdon County  
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5403

HABS  
PA,  
31-ALEX,  
10 -

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

FRANCIS CONNOR HOUSE

HABS No. PA-5403

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PA,  
31- ALEX,  
10-

Location: The building is located on the corner of Shelton Avenue and the eastern edge of the southeastern corner of the town square, Alexandria, Porter Township, Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania.

Present Owner: Raymond and Pamela Tononi.

Present Use: Multi-family dwelling.

Significance: The Francis Connor House exemplifies the type of large residential structures that were built around the town square, several of which are extant. It is also a good example of the board and batten cladding applied to Alexandria's nineteenth-century buildings.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: ca. 1856. Mary Gemmill owned a house on this site in 1826, according to tax records. However, when Francis Conner acquired the land, it is likely that he enlarged it or built anew on the lot in 1856, based on the tax assessment, which indicates an increase in the land's value from \$300 in 1855 to \$600 the next year.
2. Original and subsequent owners: The Francis Conner House sits on lot No. 51, located on the south side of Shelton Avenue. The property fronts 60' of Shelton Avenue on the north, and extends back 200'. The northwest corner of the lot borders the diamond, or town square, while the southwest corner borders another town lot. An alley borders the south and another town lot borders the east side.

The following is an incomplete chain of title to the land on which the structure stands. Reference is to the Recorder of Deeds Office of the County of Huntingdon, Pennsylvania.

1823 Deed November 12, 1823, recorded in Volume W1, Page 577.  
John and Elizabeth Brown  
TO  
Mary Gemmill.

1830 Deed December 22, 1830, recorded in Volume W1, Page 578.  
Mary Gemmill  
TO  
James Rainey.

1834 The 1855 deed history notes that in 1834 a Mr. Rainey deeded the

property to John Scott.

1855 Deed March 16, 1855, recorded in Volume L2, Page 254.

John and George Scott (sons, executors for John Scott)

TO

Francis Connor.

1873 Deed May, 26, 1873 recorded in Volume E3, Page 384.

Francis Connor

TO

Mary Bauslaugh.

1880 Deed February 16, 1880, recorded in Volume L3, Page 320.

David Miller and Calvin Bauslaugh (administrators for Mary Bauslaugh)

TO

Henrietta Miller.

1904 Deed June 13, 1904, recorded in Volume Z4, Page 200.

Henrietta and David Miller

TO

J. Calvin Mierley.

1976 Will recorded in Will Book 26, Page 182.

J. Calvin Mierley

TO

Helen Mierley (wife).

1983 Deed December 20, 1983, recorded in Volume 174, Page 598.

Helen Mierley

TO

Raymond and Pamela Tononi.

3. Original plans and construction: No original plans or drawings have been located. The seven-bay, side-facing L-plan structure is frame with board-and-batten and horizontal siding, on the south and north facades, respectively. An (early) undated photograph indicates that at one time the house had two interior brick chimneys, and a five-bay west facade with a frame porch over the central door; it also featured five or six steps leading north up to the porch, shutters, and what appears to be two-over-two-light sash. Three cellar windows are present on this west wall, one under the northernmost bay; the other two are uncentered under the two southernmost bays.
4. Alterations and additions: The west end of the building has horizontal frame siding and was possibly added ca. 1906 (Huntingdon County Historic Sites Survey form). The assumption that the two east bays of the main block are the added portion is supported by two visual factors: foremost, the use of

horizontal weatherboard siding, which was commonly used later than the 1860-70s vertical board and batten that covers the stacked-plank walls used for the other five bays; and, the irregular spacing between these two areas of the building on the rear facade, whereby the rhythm of the windows is disrupted.

A small shed-like, one-story building is attached to the south end of the ell, with a hipped roof and board and batten siding. This is probably contemporary with the rest of the board and batten section of the house.

A narrow, exterior brick chimney has been installed between the two northernmost bays on the west wall.

- B. Historical Context: In the early nineteenth century, private landowners often initiated the development of town grids. In Pennsylvania, the plans often included open squares or "diamonds," at a primary intersection, designed for practical uses such as parking wagons and market areas, particularly if a tavern or inn was nearby. These diamonds also acted as centers of social activity, and thus the land around them was considered prime real estate--sometimes fetching more money than even the houses along the Main Street (Stotz, 29). In Alexandria, the lots around the diamond were the most expensive in town. For this reason it is supposed that some of the wealthiest citizens chose to live on them; although in Alexandria, this is not necessarily borne out.

Francis Connor, who occupied the house from 1855-73, is identified in the 1860 census as a carman--possibly referring to a position with the railroad. As of two years earlier, he also owned an interest in the Alexandria brewery (Harshbarger, notes).

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The house is a large, vernacular two-story building distinguished by two wood siding materials and an apparent series of additions and alterations.
2. Condition of the fabric: Good.

- B. Description of exterior: This structure is a two-story L-plan with seven bays on the long facade and five bays on the ell. It features a board and batten exterior finish atop a stacked plank diagonal lath, combined with the addition of horizontal weatherboard.

The house has a number of unusual features: There are six fireplaces, the west-end walls are constructed of stacked plank (Harshbarger, notes), and the windows operate on a lever system (Huntingdon County Historic Sites Survey form). Two front doors are set asymmetrically into the north facade.

1. Overall dimensions: The main block is 54' x 41'.
2. Foundation: Stone.
3. Wall construction: Board and batten siding on the west end of the house;

horizontal weatherboard siding on the east end.

4. Structural system, framing: Frame and stacked plank.
5. Porches: The house features three porches, none of which are completely original. A partial, one-story off-center porch (28' x 8') protects four openings on the main (north) facade, including two doors; its hipped roof with deep moulded cornice is supported by four plain, wood Doric columns on a raised deck. The side porch (20' x 6') is nearly identical, although it is raised higher and is centered over only three bays, including one door; it also features a simple balustrade that retains a mismatch of turned and infill spindles. A wrapped porch along the rear south and east facades is raised and has a shed roof; it is considerably less formal than the other two, with informal wood supports and horizontal rails.
6. Chimneys: There are two brick chimneys: a ridge chimney in the main block, between the fifth and sixth bay, and a new exterior chimney on the west wall.
7. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: There are at least four doors, most of which appear to be at least somewhat modernized.
  - b. Windows: All windows are two-over-two-light double-hung wood sash.
8. Roof:
  - a. Shape, covering: Gable roof with asphalt shingles.
  - b. Cornice: The raked wood cornice is very deep.
- D. Site: The house stands on the southeast corner of the town's diamond--once a center of Alexandria activity, but now simply a grassy open space. It is surrounded by residential lots to the east and across Shelton Avenue on the north; to the south, beyond the large and sheltered back yard, lies an alley and, directly beyond that, the old canal embankment.

### PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Old Views (in Hartslog Heritage, 81).
- B. Primary and unpublished sources:

Porter Township tax records, 1819 to 1859, Huntingdon County Historical Society.

Alexandria Borough tax records, 1859 to 1873, Huntingdon County Historical Society and Huntingdon County Courthouse.

Huntingdon County Deed Books and Probate Records, Huntingdon County Courthouse, Huntingdon, Pennsylvania.

Huntingdon County Tax Map -- Alexandria, 01-02-35.

Huntingdon County Historical Society survey sheets.

C. Secondary and published sources:

Africa, J. Simpson. History of Huntingdon and Blair Counties, Pennsylvania. Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1883.

Harshbarger, Jean P., Nancy R. Taylor, Sara H. Zabriskie, and F.R. Zabriskie. Hartslog Heritage. State College, Pennsylvania: K-B Offset Printing, Inc., 1975.

Stotz, Charles. Architecture of Western Pennsylvania. Pittsburgh: William Helburn Inc., 1936.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was conducted by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record in cooperation with the America's Industrial Heritage Project under the directorship of Randy Cooley; AIHP is an undertaking of the National Park Service, based in Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania. Recorded under the direction of Robert J. Kapsch, chief of HABS/HAER, the project was completed during summer 1988 at the HABS field office in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Project leader was Alison K. Hoagland, senior HABS historian; field supervisor was Dorothy Burlingame, University of Vermont; project historian, Karen Genskow, Sangamon State University. Large-format photography is by David Ames. Editing of the final report was done by Sara Amy Leach, HABS historian.

This report was completed as part of a larger project documenting two canal towns--Saltsburg, on the Western Division of the Pennsylvania Mainline Canal, and Alexandria, on the Juniata Division--flanking the Allegheny Divide. Twenty-one reports on other buildings in Alexandria, an overview history of Alexandria (HABS No. PA-5407), and of canal town development in Pennsylvania (HABS No. PA-5666) are part of the HABS/HAER collection. Twenty-two reports on buildings in Saltsburg (Indiana County) and an overview history of Saltsburg (HABS No. PA-5438) are also available. Results of the project were published as Two Historic Pennsylvania Canal Towns: Alexandria and Saltsburg, Sara Amy Leach, editor (Washington, DC: Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record, National Park Service, March 1989).